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ASSASSINATION AS A POLITICAL ARGUMENT.

BY LOGAN S. ROOTS, OF ARKANSAS.

JOHN M. CLAYTON was no ordinary man. Both his head and heart were large and active, his abilities were not inferior to those of his honored brothers, and as to elements of personal popularity he was richly endowed. For as many years as he would accept the office of sheriff of the wealthy and populous county in which he resided he was elected by large majorities. Not only did all the Republicans vote for him, but his majority was augmented by the votes of many of the most pronounced and respected Democrats, including such as that of the Democratic Congressman.

In the last election he made the race for Congressional honors with his fellow-townsmen, the Hon. Clifton R. Breckinridge, of eloquent tongue and illustrious lineage. The official announcement of the result of the election gave Breckinridge the certificate by a majority of 846. Numerous unlawful acts contributing to this result were committed, and Clayton felt it to be his duty to institute a contest for the seat in Congress, to which he and many others believed that by the votes cast he had been fairly elected.

At the town of Plummerville, in Conway County, on the night of election day, the ballot box, containing about five hundred majority for Clayton, was carried away by four armed masked men. Other events subsequently occurred in this vicinity which gave warning that Clayton's contest might become a dangerous undertaking; but John M. Clayton, when warned of the danger, said he was not willing to believe it existed, but, in any event, he believed it his duty to uncover the facts; therefore he would attend the taking of evidence, even if it were at the risk of his life. Some days had been spent in investigating; Clayton looked after his own interests, Breckinridge being represented by a resident attorney. The testimony proved facts favorable to Clayton.

While on this mission, on the night of the 29th of January, in the midst of apparently peaceful surroundings, Clayton was, without apprehension, passing the evening with others in his room at his boarding-house, while outside his window a stealthy assassin waited his opportunity with deliberate murderous intent. Just as Clayton was in the act of sitting down at a table near the window to write a letter to his motherless family, a gun was fired; a crash was heard; the Clayton-Breckinridge contest was ended; a soul was sent unshriven before the final Judge; a pure heart was expending its last throbs in wasting, through the ghastly wound made by the cruel assassin, the blood from the speechless form of John M. Clayton.

And now the Editor of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW invites me to express my views of the cause and effects of this murder, and the best means of preventing similar occurrences. There are peculiarly embarrassing environments to me in touching upon this atrocious crime, which, together with the inconsiderate haste that the early date of going to press makes necessary, causes me to approach the subject with misgivings as to my ability to write what shall prove satisfactory to either reader or writer.

As to the cause, I prefer simply to present the honest editorial views of the two leading Democratic Arkansas daily papers, as follows:

THE FRUIT OF FRAUD.

The cold-blooded assassination at Plummerville on Tuesday night is the fruit of ballot-box robbery. The story is a short one and it may do some good to repeat it. At the September election there were notorious frauds upon the ballot in this State in several counties—the worst by far being perpetrated in this, the capital county, where the safe in the county clerk's office was robbed of nine ballot-boxes, which, if counted, would have elected the entire opposition ticket, with the exception of county clerk and county judge. This flagrant outrage was followed by the stealing of a ballot-box in Howard Township, Conway County, at the Congressional election in November. This township was known to have cast a large majority for the Republican candidate, Hon. John M. Clayton. In the investigation which followed, Col. Clayton went to Plummerville to take testimony in the case and was assassinated in cold blood.—*Arkansas Democrat*.

THE FRUIT OF CORRUPT POLITICS.

The foulest blot on the page of Arkansas history is the assassination of Col. John M. Clayton. . . .

Colonel Clayton was proceeding quietly to gather testimony on which to base his contest for a seat in Congress. The nature of the inquiry he was prosecuting was not of the sort that leads to violence or provokes crime. The voters of the township were merely being put through an inquiry as to how they voted on the sixth of November. There had not been the least rupture between any of the parties concerned; so that the hand that committed this act was impelled to do it by motives as coolly and deliberately formed and carried out as ever plotted assassination.

This foul act follows the stealing of the ballot-box in that township on the night of the November election as naturally as darkness follows the setting sun. It is a political crime that would not have occurred had Colonel Clayton not been there prosecuting a political contest. It is the natural development of corrupt politics, and it is shocking enough, and horrible enough, and damaging enough to the State of Arkansas and the whole South to cause a revolution that shall root out the last vestige of crime from our politics, let it cost what it may.—*Arkansas Gazette*.

I desire, however, to say that the mass of the people of Arkansas have never had any sympathy with election frauds; there is always before the eyes of the beneficiary of lawlessness a veil that modifies the heinousness of a crime. Politicians who have been beneficiaries of fraudulent practices in the management of elections have consoled themselves with the idea that in each particular instance the end justified the means. This state of mind, in my opinion, is with them a disease like color-blindness, that may exist while the system otherwise is in perfect condition, and when the afflicted does not realize the infirmity.

I shall not discuss the responsibility of party leaders, who have reasons for what they do, and who, though they may not instigate the crime, can by a word create a sentiment that would prevent the enjoyment of the fruits of election frauds. I have lived with these Arkansas people in such intimate relationship, and have enjoyed so greatly their warm friendships, that I must enter my most emphatic contradiction of the theory, that many seem conscientiously to entertain, to the effect that this murder is proof that the Democratic party of Arkansas, severally and collectively, premeditate, plan, and promote such crimes.

The effects are manifold and immeasurable. As the murder of Lovejoy in Southern Illinois retarded the progress of that region for a quarter of a century, and largely contributed to the circumstances which gave to that end of Illinois the appellation of Egypt, so will the unfortunate, atrocious murder of Clayton inflict injury upon Arkansas that will not be fully eradicated during the present generation. But terribly cruel as is the crime, the effects are not all evil. It is a sin from which there are good results. So appalling was the crime, so prominent the victim, that the whole Nation is shocked, and Arkansans realize, as they never would without some extraordinary occurrence, that as certainly as rivulets flow to the river and the river to the sea, so surely will unrebuked irregularities lead to unbridled lawlessness and appalling crimes.

A Democratic United States Senator, whose ideas on other than political subjects are so pure and correct that I would, on leaving the world, appoint him, with perfect confidence, executor to manage my estate and care for my wife and daughters, told me since the election that the people of the South would not permit unworthy persons to hold office, either county, State, or National. He made this statement with such peculiar emphasis as to leave no doubt whatever that he believed the Guiteau plan of "removal" was to be practised ; and now that so good a man as Clayton has been thus "removed" from contesting for the Congressional seat, that Senator has announced his abhorrence of the crime in such a manner as convinces me that he concludes it will not do to trust to the murderer to decide whether or not the Republican selected to office is an "unworthy person." He may see that if the same person is to be judge and executioner, he may attempt now to remove one of the opposition party, and at the next election feel justified in murdering the member of an opposite political faction in his own party ; and, if so, he would be likely to select a prominent leader—for it is written, "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." A small crevice in the dike, left unchecked, leads to certain devastation ; and if this harrowing crime convinces the Democratic leaders of the South that irregularities in elections lead to results which, in their own estimation, are more appalling than the holding of office by persons whom they consider unworthy, great good will be the result.

No person, who has not lived in the South, can possibly appreciate the force with which appeal is made to race prejudices ; nor can he possibly understand the intensity of the feeling aroused by the fear of negro domination. If he could, he would then be able to form some conception of the force of an appeal to the white race to do whatever is necessary to prevent the ascendancy of the party with which the negro largely votes. In Arkansas, however, where the percentage of negro population is smallest, and of the white Northern-born population largest, of all the States south of Mason and Dixon's line, reason is gaining ground in its contest with prejudice. In the last election, the candidate for Governor nominated by the Wheelers, and voted for by the Republicans, received such a large vote that he fully believes he was rightfully elected. Business enterprise is also

causing thousands to break loose from the dictates of prejudice, and to work to promote a free ballot and a fair count. The encouragement of manufactures; the incoming of Northern life, energy, and capital to enjoy and utilize our genial climate, great wasted water-powers, wonderful undeveloped minerals, unsurpassed, fertile, uncultivated lands, and other unexcelled natural resources, are aiding to redeem the State. If this great crime shall arouse the people to the realization of the disastrous results of prejudice, it will accelerate the progress of the various movements prompted by reason and enterprise.

The bold and praiseworthy manner in which the Democratic press has commented upon the crime is, necessarily, having a greatly beneficial educational influence. The Governor has exhibited a determination to do all that an earnest Christian executive can do. The Legislature has passed an enactment enabling him to offer a reward of five thousand dollars more for the apprehension of the murderer than he was able to do under pre-existing laws. The individual citizens have subscribed funds liberally to give encouragement to the efforts to apprehend the murderer, and though the immediate community may appear to present only blunt sensibilities, yet the great mass of the people of the State are in sympathy with the movement to make the crime odious.

Usually, when a disease is properly diagnosed, the remedy is easily ascertainable ; but this is not the case with the general subject that this special incident presents with painful forcibleness to the thought of every intelligent patriot, regardless of geographical location.

The cowardly murder of Clayton was committed by a person whose first stifling of conscience for political purposes did not embrace assassination. At the polls the judges of election had been interfered with, without denunciation by the people of the community. The ballot-box was stolen, for which no person was arrested ; and, finally, when the assassination followed, the people in the vicinity naturally did not realize the enormity of the crime.

The citizens of Arkansas are not naturally lawless. When there is a real heart-felt belief that it is as much a crime to steal a ballot-box as to steal a horse; as much a perjury to swear falsely concerning election returns as to swear to any other false statement ; when fraud-tainted and blood-stained claims to office shall

not be valid, and when all transgressions, great or small, affecting elections, which would be crimes, if done for the accomplishment of results in other walks of life, shall be considered as crimes when enacted for political purposes, then the disease will be entirely eradicated.

Some thoughtful persons believe that the great panacea is the education of the ignorant masses. I, too, believe that the troubles increase with the decadence of a sincere love of popular education. We have excellent free schools in Arkansas, which are eagerly patronized by our laboring people, and certainly merit all the assistance obtainable. Yet the Legislature of 1883, by an overwhelming majority, recommended the passage by Congress of the act extending National aid to the free schools of the Nation; whereas the Legislature now in session has, by a practically unanimous vote, declared its sentiments against Federal aid to free schools. I do not believe that education can be, solely, a complete remedy, but I believe it is the Nation's duty to exercise liberality in combatting illiteracy, and in every other proper method to promote the elevation of its citizens.

Colonel Shepard is eminently correct, and has struck the popular chord, when announcing in the *Mail and Express* that General Benjamin Harrison is right in saying that such things as the stealing of ballot-boxes and the killing of John M. Clayton must be stopped; but when he says, "If you want one million men to stop them, you can have the Boys in Blue in thirty days' time," he states another truth, which, however, under the circumstances, needs addition, in my opinion. Of course, all our soldiers now dress in blue; but if an army is efficient to enforce obedience to the laws, it will come alike from those who wore the gray and those who wore the blue. The people of the South will say that crime must be punished, anarchists and other murderers must be convicted and hanged, alike in Chicago, Ill., and Plummerville, Ark., and no million men will be needed in one case more than the other. But the obdurate fact is that, no matter how willing the patriotic people of all sections are to enlist for the war, it may well be doubted whether the President can utilize an army for the purposes suggested.

There are physicians and there is a remedy which can, with certainty, cure the disease and absolutely prevent a repetition of such crimes as the especial one under consideration. The Demo-

cratic leaders' influence in the premises can be absolutely controlling. Futile will it be for them to ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" If they WILL it, from that hour such crimes will be impossible. Their simple wish on this particular subject would be as potential as the fiat of Deity. I cannot but believe that that wish will be uttered. It seems to me the ultimatum is the speeding of a section of our country towards savagery, or the acceleration of its progress to unexampled prosperity.

At the last election a man of remarkable equipoise and noted steadfastness in always doing the right, as God gives him to see the right, was, against great odds, elected to be Chief Magistrate of the Nation; and no other cause did more to secure that result and to elect a United States House of Representatives in sympathy with him than the great, prevailing, heart-felt desire to have American citizenship become, as it should be, the most prized title in the world. No intelligent persons think that the President-elect will be a Louis XVI. or a Charles I.; but they do believe that upon the incoming of the new Administration, "with malice towards none and charity for all," he will be simply the President of all people of all politics in the greatest Republic on earth, under which not only the life of every citizen will be held precious, but the rights of all citizens, of whatever creed, color, or locality, will be maintained so sacredly as to demand love and obedience at home and respect and admiration abroad, and they will thereby become the recipients of blessings from the Supreme Ruler of all nations.

LOGAN S. ROOTS.